COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Budget Workshop #1

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TOWN CLERK

Tuesday, February 25, 2025
6:00 PM
William J. Johnston Middle School BlackBox Theatre

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT : Chair Donna Antonacci, Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Margo Gignac, Alexander Oliphant, Michelle Millington, Rosemary Gignac and Stefanie Tracey-Calash.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT : Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Director of Pupil Services Eve Hurley, Assistant Director of Pupil Services Rebecca Tedesco, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, BA Assistant Principal Melissa Cyr, BA Assistant Principal Michael Mal, William J Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) Principal Christopher Bennett, WJJMS Assistant Principal Stacey Ewings, Jack Jackter Intermediate School (JJIS) Principal Elise Butson, Colchester Elementary School (CES) Principal Judy O'Meara, CES Assistant Principal Meghan Amado.

OTHERS PRESENT : Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Fratoni, Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari

1. **MEETING OPENING**
   1.1. Call to Order
   Chair Antonacci called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM

   1.2 Roll Call
   Chair Antonacci, Vice-Chair Rivers, A.Oliphant and S.Tracey-Calash present.

   1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

M.Millington arrived via Zoom at 6:04PM

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**
   2.1. For Public Comments, please see Bylaw on Meeting Conduct
   - **Frank Bloom, Park Ave -** Mr. Bloom stated that he is opposed to the magnet program due to its cost to citizens. The survey results speak for themselves, and another survey is unnecessary.

M.Gignac and R.Gignac arrived at 6:06PM

- **Erin Kaiser, Carriage Drive** - via Zoom, Ms. Kaiser spoke in support of the magnet school, noting that many residents still support it. She emphasized that children coming from out of district are still children and do not bring crime to the town. She encouraged the community to welcome them and expressed support for Colchester's children.
- **Michael Dubreuil, Woodbine Road** - Mr. Dubreuil stated that programs like this require community support but expressed concerns that the Board of Education has not been transparent. He argued that the initiative supports DEI and has not been honestly represented. He questioned whether the administration is not aligned or is misleading the public. He asked for clarification on the cost per student and the revenue generated, noting that, based on his calculations, it costs over $18,000 to educate a Colchester student. He asserted that the program costs more to operate than it brings in and urged a "no" vote.
- **Deanna Bouchard, Meadow Drive** - via Zoom, Ms. Bouchard stated that disclosing an address is not required by state law and that the public cannot be dictated on what to comment about. She expressed opposition to the magnet school and noted that there was a warning back in November to pause and educate the public. She thanked the Democrats for their due diligence in considering public sentiment and support.
- **Vincent Rose, Shadbush Drive** - Mr. Rose spoke in support of DEI, stating that it has been politicized in a way that divides the country. He emphasized the importance of welcoming diversity of background and opinion and expecting the best from everyone who comes to the community. He acknowledged that the magnet program is a complicated issue and a large project.
- **Olivia Duksa, Starr Road** - Ms. Duksa spoke in opposition to the magnet school, expressing concerns that finances have not been allocated properly within Colchester Public Schools. She stated that Bacon Academy (BA) needs a serious overhaul and questioned why more money would be put into a second school when BA is in disrepair. As a parent of two children in the district, she noted being inundated with ParentSquare communications but felt that the survey was difficult to find and not well-publicized to those outside the school system. She expressed frustration that the process felt rushed and that citizens were not properly informed. She emphasized the need to prioritize local students before expanding, stating that while she welcomes diversity, the town must take care of its own children first.
- **Lea Poresky, Settlers Lane** - Ms. Poresky spoke in opposition to the magnet school, stating that after attending multiple meetings, she does not see a benefit for local students. As a taxpayer and parent, she expressed frustration that significant time has been spent on this issue without adequate communication. She emphasized that tax dollars are funding salaries and that the time of Board of Education members is being wasted. She urged the board to put an end to the discussion and focus on addressing the needs of Colchester's own students.

3. <u>*DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION</u>

3.1. *Discussion and Possible Action on disbanding the Ad Hoc Magnet Survey Committee
Motion by: M.Millington
Motion to disband the Ad Hoc Magnet Survey Committee
Second: C.Rivers
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

3.2. *Proposed HAPS Magnet School
Motion by: C.Rivers

Motion to have the Colchester Public Schools stop work on the HAPS Magnet Program
Second: A.Oliphant
Discussion:

- M.Gignac thanked the administration for their hard work on this initiative over the past year. She noted that the magnet school would not only bring in tuition revenue but also provide additional financial benefits to the school. She highlighted the added advantage of removing an old building and replacing it with an entirely new facility. She expressed disappointment at the possibility of the project not moving forward.
- M.Millington thanked everyone involved and expressed her support for the project from the beginning. She acknowledged that the rollout did not go as planned and noted that a misleading narrative had circulated in town, suggesting an ulterior motive. She emphasized that the project was always intended to benefit all of the town's children and the community as a whole.
- Vice-Chair Rivers thanked everyone involved and acknowledged the uncertainty of the project's future. He expressed his belief that another town may take on the initiative. While he supports the merits of the project, he recognized that its success depends on community support and the priorities for other improvements within the schools.
- S.Tracey-Calash expressed that she holds her responsibility on the Board in high regard, viewing the Board as a calm force in the storm of decision-making. She emphasized the importance of considering all corners of Colchester when making decisions for the town. Initially, she was fully on board with the magnet school, believing in public service and diversity. However, after reviewing the survey results and the mixed responses, she became concerned by the lack of support for the program. As a parent, she was disheartened by the division of opinions. With budget season and uncertainty ahead, she stated that she cannot vote in favor of the program at this time. She expressed respect for her fellow board members and the administration, but acknowledged that they do not all agree on this issue. Her primary desire is to support the community in the best way possible.
- A.Oliphant spoke in favor of providing more opportunities for kids, noting that not every child goes to college, and the magnet school would offer a valuable alternative. However, he echoed the Vice-Chairs sentiment about the importance of community support in moving forward with the program.
- Chair Antonacci thanked the administration for all of their hard work.

Roll Call: Yes: M.Millington, S.Tracey-Calash, A.Oliphant,Vice-Chair Rivers
No: M.Gignac, Chair Antonacci, R.Gignac
Vote: Motion carried 4:3

3.3. *Presentation, Recommendation, Discussion and Possible Action on BA HVAC Design Work from HFLenz

Scott Kraynak, a representative from HFLenz, provided an update on the existing conditions at Bacon Academy (BA), specifically regarding heating and air conditioning systems. A full survey of the air conditioning units has been completed, with the heating units deemed to be in fair to good condition, while the air conditioning units are non-operational. He mentioned that potential solutions have been explored, and the classrooms, gym, auditorium, and art areas fall within the budget of the grant. However, other areas are beyond the scope of the grant and the district's contributions. A detailed report will be released soon, and he welcomed any questions. He also emphasized the importance of fiscal responsibility by the end of the year and stated that the goal is to move forward with the selection process, get the project to bid, and begin construction over the summer.

Vice-Chair Rivers asked what decision needs to be made this evening, specifically inquiring whether the Board needs to accept the recommendation of HFLenz to send the project out for an RFP in order to contract the work. He also asked if additional information, such as the final report, would be coming. Vice-Chair Rivers suggested that the Board could potentially review the report and make a decision at the next meeting, requesting to read the report prior to Thursday before making a final decision. Kraynak confirmed he would be available on Thursday to answer any questions the Board may have.

S.Tracey-Calash requested clarification of the recommendation. Kraynak stated that the report will include three potential solutions, each with pros and cons.

A.Barillari confirmed that the recommendation is within the available funds and expressed confidence in HFLenz handling the project.

Superintendent Sullivan pointed out that the report would leave out two art rooms (to be addressed with mini-splits) and a few shop areas with outside access and high ceilings to be without AC.

M.Millington noted that the third floor tends to get humid during the warmer months and expressed her anticipation of seeing the report.

Kraynak mentioned that the report would include an alternative for cost control, depending on how contractors bid on the project.

4. <u>*PRIORITY DISCUSSION</u>

4.1. Board Q&A on Following Budgets: CES, JJIS, Pupil Services, General Operating, Transportation

Assistant Superintendent Kuckel provided information on District Goals, importance of small class sizes and CPS Academic Performance.

CES Principal O'Meara presented on CES Staffing needs and achievement.

JJIS Principal Butson addressed JJIS staffing needs and achievements.

Director Of Pupil Services and Special Education Hurley presented on Special Education, 504 planning, specialized programming, high needs learners and specialized transportation.

Superintendent Sullivan addressed those budget items that do not fall under one category.

Director of Educational Operations Barillari and Director of Finance and Operations Linkkila presented district transportation.

- M.Millington questioned:
  - For a quick overview of enrollment, particularly in terms of expanding classrooms at CES and JJIS, and whether there is an expected increase in Kindergarten enrollment.
  - The specifics of the playground at Jackter, including the equipment and the condition of the grounds. Principal Butson explained that everything has worn down over the years due to heavy community use, and the areas most in need of attention are also used by the community.
  - MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) program, noting that it utilizes a lot of staff. She wanted to know if there are enough personnel to run MTSS effectively, and it was confirmed that there are sufficient staff to support it.
  - Combined bus routes, questioning whether it is better to keep them combined or separate. The recommendation was to keep the bus routes separate, as that is considered the best practice.
- Vice-Chair Rivers questioned:
  - The different steps for teachers
  - Clarification regarding Page 18, Lines 27-28, there are currently two MLL (Multilingual Learners) teachers, with the second MLL teacher split between the schools.
  - Clarification regarding Nurses, Lines 53-55. Hurley explained that there are

currently two Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) nurses at CES, 1.5 FTE nurses at Bacon Academy (BA), and one FTE nurse at WJJMS and JJIS. The proposed addition of 2.0 FTE nurses would ensure each school has a second nurse available during the student day, as nurse paraeducators are no longer part of the staffing plan.
    - Clarification on if the Magnet School Tuition in the CES budget Lines 100-102 was for services or if it was for actual tuition to a school.
- Chair Antonacci questioned:
    - Whether any part of the nurse staffing rearrangement was due to state requirements, Hurley stated the ratio of 1 nurse to 700 students is required. She noted that this ratio applies to "healthy" students, implying that it does not fully account for students with additional health needs, which require more nurses.
- S.Tracy-Calash questioned:
    - Clarification on Page 68, decrease in the orange, why it was happening. Hurley indicated that it is a "moving target" based on the changing needs of students.
    - The implications of legislation being voted on that day. Superintendent Sullivan noted that the bill passed the House and is moving to the Senate this week. The legislation is expected to help with current expenses, with hopes to continue funding at a higher percentage in the future.
- Vice-Chair Rivers questioned:
    - On Page 22, Line 27, he inquired if the situation at JJIS was the same as at CES. The answer was yes.
    - Line 60 in JJIS (Decreasing by $2k), why is this line decreasing. R.Linkkila stated that the reduction was due to the safety officers' salaries. The first year of employing safety officers resulted in less days being used than initially projected, and the budget was adjusted to reflect that. The same adjustment applied to all security officers.
    - Page 41, Rivers thanked the paraeducators for their work, acknowledging the importance of their role.
    - Line 146, Page 43, Rivers noted that this line was going down by $129k and asked if this represented the savings discussed previously. Hurley indicated that savings were projected due to adjustments in routes, the number of students, types of vehicles used, and the impact of IEP obligations. The district is using more vans and could potentially use minibuses in certain cases.
    - Rivers asked about the effects of the age shift for Kindergarten students, and Principal O'Meara explained that there is a better understanding this year. The waiver process has been implemented, and fewer people are opting for waivers compared to last year.
    - Page 49, Line 38 (Up by $760k), Rivers inquired about the increase. R.Linkkila clarified that part of the increase was due to $400k being taken out of the health reserve account last year, which should have been budgeted for that year. The normal increases, amounting to $360k, also contributed to the increase. The district is currently reviewing whether the health reserve is adequately funded.

4.2. Citizen Q&A on Following Budgets: CES, JJIS, Pupil Services, General Operating, Transportation

- **Tiffany Moroch, Maclyn Drive**
    - Potential benefits or breakeven point if the district operated its own buses. Barillari and Linkkila indicated that there would be a significant increase in costs, including the need for more employees, a mechanic, and higher insurance premiums.

- If there was any value in splitting the insurance and using part of it for maintenance costs. Vice-Chair Rivers stated this is a consideration but would need further analysis.
- Concern about the Health Reserve Account and its health, asking how much risk the district is willing to take in terms of its sustainability.
- Large decrease in "Other Contractual Obligations" and asked if this was a short-term issue, with an expected increase in future years. R.Linkkila noted that this is subject to fluctuations based on factors like retirements and sick-time payouts. She also stated it depends on retirements each year, making them a moving target for budgeting purposes.

- **Vincent Rose, Shadbush Drive**
  - Thank you for the presentations
  - Stressed the importance of small class sizes and special education
  - Aim high for goals and report the true needs of the district.

4.3. Board Q&A on Following Budgets: CES, JJIS, Pupil Services, General Operating, Transportation

- Vice Chair Rivers
  - Where in the budget is the Director of Safety & Security? R.Linkkila stated that it is on page 49, line 16. That cost is also offset by line 118 on page 51.

5. <u>ADJOURNMENT</u>

Motion by: C.Rivers
Motion to adjourn.
Second: M.Gignac
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

Chair Antonacci adjourned the meeting at 8:19 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Afratoni

Alyssa Fratoni
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent